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CINCSO FOR INTAFF

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
 TAGS: PTER, PINS, AR
 SUBJ: TERRORISM IN ARGENTINA

REFS: (A) BUENOS AIRES 519, (B) BUENOS AIRES 4476,
 (C) BUENOS AIRES 4520

1. SUMMARY: FROM JANUARY UNTIL JUNE 8 (WHEN A BOMB WAS FOUND ON THE AIRPLANE SCHEDULED TO TAKE MRS. PERON BACK TO SPAIN), TERRORISM IN ARGENTINA WAS AT A LOW LEVEL. THIS IS LIKELY TO REMAIN TRUE OVER THE SHORT TERM AS THE PUBLIC AWAITS THE OUTCOME OF ITS DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT, BUT THE BOMB CAUSED CONCERN ABOUT A POSSIBLE RETURN OF THE TERRORISM OF THE 1970S. NO ONE HAS BEEN ARRESTED FOR THAT ATTEMPTED MASS MURDER YET. WHILE EXTREMISTS OCCASIONALLY ACT TO REINFORCE THEIR PRESENCE IN THE PUBLIC MIND, THEIR ACTIVITIES ARE CIRCUMSCRIBED BY THEIR CURRENT SMALL NUMBERS AND LACK OF POPULAR SUPPORT. SECTORS RECEPTIVE TO THE VIOLENT DESTABILIZATION OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL ORDER DO EXIST, HOWEVER, WITHIN THE MILITARY, THE POLICE, OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES, AND YOUTH GROUPS. THE ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION PERIODICALLY RAISES THE SPECTER OF TERRORISM BOTH OUT OF GENUINE CONCERN AND AS A WAY OF RALLYING PUBLIC SUPPORT TO ITS PROGRAMS. THE GOA HAS ALSO ACCEPTED THE CONDITIONS PLACED BY BRAZIL'S SUPREME COURT ON THE EXTRADITION OF MONTEVIDEO TERRORIST LEADER MARIO FIRMENICH, WHO WILL BE TRIED IN ARGENTINA IF ALL GOES AS PLANNED BY THE GOA. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) TERRORISM REMAINS AN ISSUE OF CONCERN AMONG ARGENTINES. WITH THE ATTEMPT ON MRS. PERON'S LIFE, THIS UNDERCURRENT OF FEAR HAS RISEN TO THE SURFACE (SEE REFTELS B AND C). PRESIDENT RAUL ALFONSIN'S PAST WARNINGS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA IF "NATIONAL UNITY" IS NOT ACHIEVED NOW SEEM PROPHECIC TO SOME. YET, EXCEPT FOR THE BOMB, POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE HAS BEEN OF A SCATTERED AND INFREQUENT NATURE, DECLINING STEADILY SINCE AN UPSWING LAST JANUARY (SEE REFTEL A).

3. SINCE JANUARY, LEFT-WING TERRORISTS HAVE BEEN VERY QUIET. NOTHING MUCH AS BEEN SEEN OR HEARD PUBLICLY FROM GROUPS SUCH AS THE MONTONEROS AND THE PEOPLE'S

REVOLUTIONARY ARMY, EXCEPT FOR SOME FLIERS DISTRIBUTED BY THE MONTONEROS AT RALLIES AND SOME BUSINESSMEN STATING THAT THE MONTONEROS ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO RESTORING DEMOCRACY TO ARGENTINA (SIC). SOME ARGENTINE OFFICIALS BELIEVE THE MONTONEROS ARE TRYING TO REORGANIZE, RECRUIT NEW PEOPLE, AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE WHEN SOCIAL UNREST MAY OFFER POSSIBILITIES TO BE EXPLOITED. NO ONE KNOWS YET WHO PLANTED THE BOMB ON MRS. PERON'S PLANE. NO ARRESTS HAVE BEEN MADE, AND THE GOA'S INVESTIGATION CONTINUES.

4. ANOTHER CONCERN OF THE ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION IS NOW THE MILITARY, POLICE, AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES WILL REACT TO AN INCREASE IN TERRORISM. MANY IN THE ARMED FORCES AND THE STATE INTELLIGENCE SECRETARIAT (SIDE) ARE DISPLEASED WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THEIR ROLE UNDER THE PREVIOUS MILITARY REGIME. SIDE, FOR INSTANCE, IS ACCUSED BY SOME OFFICIALS OF HARBORING WITHIN ITSELF THE SO-CALLED REPRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PREVIOUS DE FACTO GOVERNMENT. MILITARY OFFICERS AND HCOS ALSO HAVE AN ADDITIONAL COMPLAINT; THEY ARE UNHAPPY ABOUT THEIR WAGES. CURRENTLY, LIEUTENANTS EARN FROM 6,500 TO 10,600 PESOS A MONTH (ABOUT U.S. \$100 TO \$165), COLONELS FROM 21,600 TO 26,200 PESOS (U.S. \$338 TO \$408), AND GENERALS FROM 29,700 TO 33,500 PESOS (U.S. \$455 TO \$515). NATURALLY, HCOS EARN EVEN LESS. IN REAL TERMS, THESE SALARIES ARE AT THEIR LOWEST LEVEL IN TEN YEARS. RECENTLY, SOME PERONIST POLITICIANS HAVE BEGUN TO CALL FOR MAJOR INCREASES IN MILITARY COMPENSATION. THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO READJUST SALARIES OVER THE NEXT TWO OR THREE MONTHS TO PROVIDE REAL WAGE INCREASES FOR THE LOWEST-RANKING PERSONNEL OF THE ARMED FORCES. THE REST OF THE MILITARY WILL APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THE SAME INCREASES AS OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES, BUT PUBLIC SECTOR PAY IS POOR AND LIKELY TO GET WORSE AS IT CONTINUES TO LAG BEHIND INFLATION.

5. MILITARY DISCONTENT HAS YET TO SPILL OVER INTO ANY IMPORTANT OVERT ACTS. THE ARMED FORCES, HOWEVER, ARE ALSO A TARGET FOR TERRORISTS. AS A TARGET, THE MILITARY FIGURED TWICE IN APRIL. ON APRIL 7, AND AGAIN ON APRIL 26 IN A STRONGER EXPLOSION, BOMBS DAMAGED EMPTY MILITARY CLUBS IN CORDOBA. THE FACT THAT NO ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL WERE INJURED IN EITHER ATTACK RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF MILITARY COMPLICITY. IN THIS VEIN, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT CORDOBA IS HOME TO MANY RETIRED OFFICERS WHO BELIEVE THE MILITARY IS SUFFERING POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY UNDER RADICAL PARTY RULE. OFFICIALS OF THE SECOND CLUB, HOWEVER, BLAMED THE EXPLOSION ON THE MONTONEROS. GOVERNMENT AND RADICAL PARTY SPOKESMEN FOUND THIS CLAIM FAR-FETCHED. IT WAS MUCH MORE LIKELY THE BOMB WAS DETONATED BY THE EXTREME RIGHT IN AN ATTEMPT TO "DIVIDE THE PEOPLE AND ITS GOVERNMENT FROM THE ARMED FORCES," STATED CORDOBA RADICAL YOUTH LEADER (AND PROVINCIAL LEGISLATOR) MARIO NEGRI.

6. (U) THE PROBLEMS OF THE MILITARY ARE MIRRORRED IN THE POLICE FORCES. POLICEMEN IN ARGENTINA ARE POORLY PAID. THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS NEW OFFICERS RECEIVE 6,000 PESOS PER MONTH (U.S. \$125), WHILE DISSIDENT POLICE PLACE THE TRUE FIGURE AT 5,600 PESOS (U.S. \$90). TOP LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS RECEIVE ABOUT 20,000 PESOS PER MONTH (U.S. \$300). MANY POLICE OFFICERS ALSO FEEL UNJUSTLY BRANDED FOR EXCESSES COMMITTED DURING THE SO-CALLED "DIRTY WAR" AGAINST SUBVERSION. POLICE DISSATISFACTION HAS BOILED OVER INTO A NUMBER OF SMALL DEMONSTRATIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, THE MOST VISIBLE BEING THE MAY 3 DEMONSTRATION OF ABOUT 200 UNIFORMED POLICEMEN IN THE HISTORIC PLAZA DE MAYO IN FRONT OF

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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GOVERNMENT HOUSE. THIS DEMONSTRATION WAS LABELLED PART OF A "NATIONWIDE DECTABILIZATION CAMPAIGN" BY FEDERAL POLICE CHIEF ANTONIO DI VIETRI. IN EARLY JUNE, IN ANOTHER SIGN OF CONTINUING DISCONTENT, MENDOZA POLICE REPORTEDLY REFUSED TO GO ON DUTY ONE EVENING IN AN ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT INTO MEETING THEIR WAGE DEMANDS.

7. RECENT WEAPONS THEFTS IN ARGENTINA MAY SET THE STAGE FOR AN UPSWING IN VIOLENCE ONCE CONDITIONS ARE RIPE. IN MAY, AT LEAST SEVEN NON-COMMISSIONED ARMY OFFICERS AND SEVERAL CIVILIANS IN TWO UNRELATED INCIDENTS WERE ARRESTED FOR TRAFFICKING IN STOLEN ARMS. THE ARMY OFFICIALS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, MARKETING THEIR WEAPONS (MOSTLY SUBMACHINE GUNS) TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND CENTRAL AMERICAN REBELS. AN ARMY COMMUNIQUE STATED THAT THE THEFTS BEGAN EARLY LAST YEAR, THOUGH OTHER REPORTS SPECULATED THAT MUCH OF THE EQUIPMENT WAS STOLEN DURING THE 1982 FALKLANDS WAR. ONE DAO SOURCE CLAIMED THE THEFTS WERE INTENDED TO SUPPLY LEFT-WING "SUBVERSIVES", BUT OTHER SPECULATION CENTERED ON THE POSSIBILITY THE WEAPONS WERE BEING STOCKPILED BY RIGHT-WING TERRORISTS. THESE STOCKPILES, NEWSPAPER REPORTS SUGGESTED, MAY ALSO BE SUPPLIED BY WEAPONS SMUGGLED INTO ARGENTINA FROM NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. IN ANY CASE, SOME TERRORISTS DO NOT SEEM TO BE HAVING PROBLEMS PROCURING ARMS. TWO HEAVILY ARMED RIGHT-WING EXTREMISTS, FOR INSTANCE, WERE ARRESTED ON APRIL 24 IN LA PLATA CITY. THESE MEN ALSO CARRIED JUSTICIALIST PARTY CREDENTIALS, WHICH PARTY SPOKESMEN CLAIMED WERE FORGED.

8. (U) INTERIOR MINISTER ANTONIO TROCCOLI TOLD THE PRESS ON JUNE 21 THE GOA WOULD ACCEPT THE CONDITIONS PLACED BY BRAZIL'S SUPREME COURT ON THE EXTRADITION OF MONTONERO LEADER MARIO FIRMENICH. THE BRAZILIAN COURT SAID IT WOULD EXTRADITE FIRMENICH ONLY IF THE GOA AGREED NOT TO TRY HIM ON WHAT THE COURT CONSIDERS TO BE POLITICAL CRIMES (I.E., ILLEGAL ASSOCIATION, POSSESSION OF ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES, AND USE OF FALSE DOCUMENTS). THE COURT ALSO RULED FIRMENICH COULD NOT BE SENTENCED TO MORE THAN 30 YEARS IN PRISON IF ARGENTINE COURTS FIND HIM GUILTY OF MURDER, ATTEMPTED MURDER, AND/OR KIDNAPPING.

9. COMMENT: THE APPARENT ATTEMPT ON MRS. PERON'S LIFE HIGHLIGHTS THE CONTINUING ROLE OF TERRORISM IN ARGENTINE POLITICS. THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER HIGH-PROFILE ASSAULTS CANNOT BE RULED OUT, SUCH AS ON FIRMENICH. DESPITE THIS, THE QUANTITY OF POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE IN ARGENTINA IS PRESENTLY AT A LOW LEVEL. THE NEWS MEDIA, WITH ITS RESTRAINED COVERAGE OF THE TERRORIST THREAT, HAS HELPED TO REINFORCE THIS IMPRESSION. HISTORY, POLITICS, AND ECONOMICS, HOWEVER, ARGUE AGAINST DISCOUNTING ANY FUTURE RISE IN THE NUMBER OF TERRORIST ACTS. EXTREMISTS AT BOTH ENDS OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE POSITIONING THEMSELVES FOR THIS INCREASE BY BUILDING TIES TO TARGETED GROUPS. SHOULD ECONOMIC CONDITIONS CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE, PROVOKING SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL UNREST AND POLITICAL ALIENATION, THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY COULD BE SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED, AND EXTREMISTS COULD ONCE AGAIN FIND FERTILE GROUND AMONG DISSATISFIED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY. ORTIZ

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